

THREE MODERN PLAYS

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THREE MODERN PLAYS

Selected by

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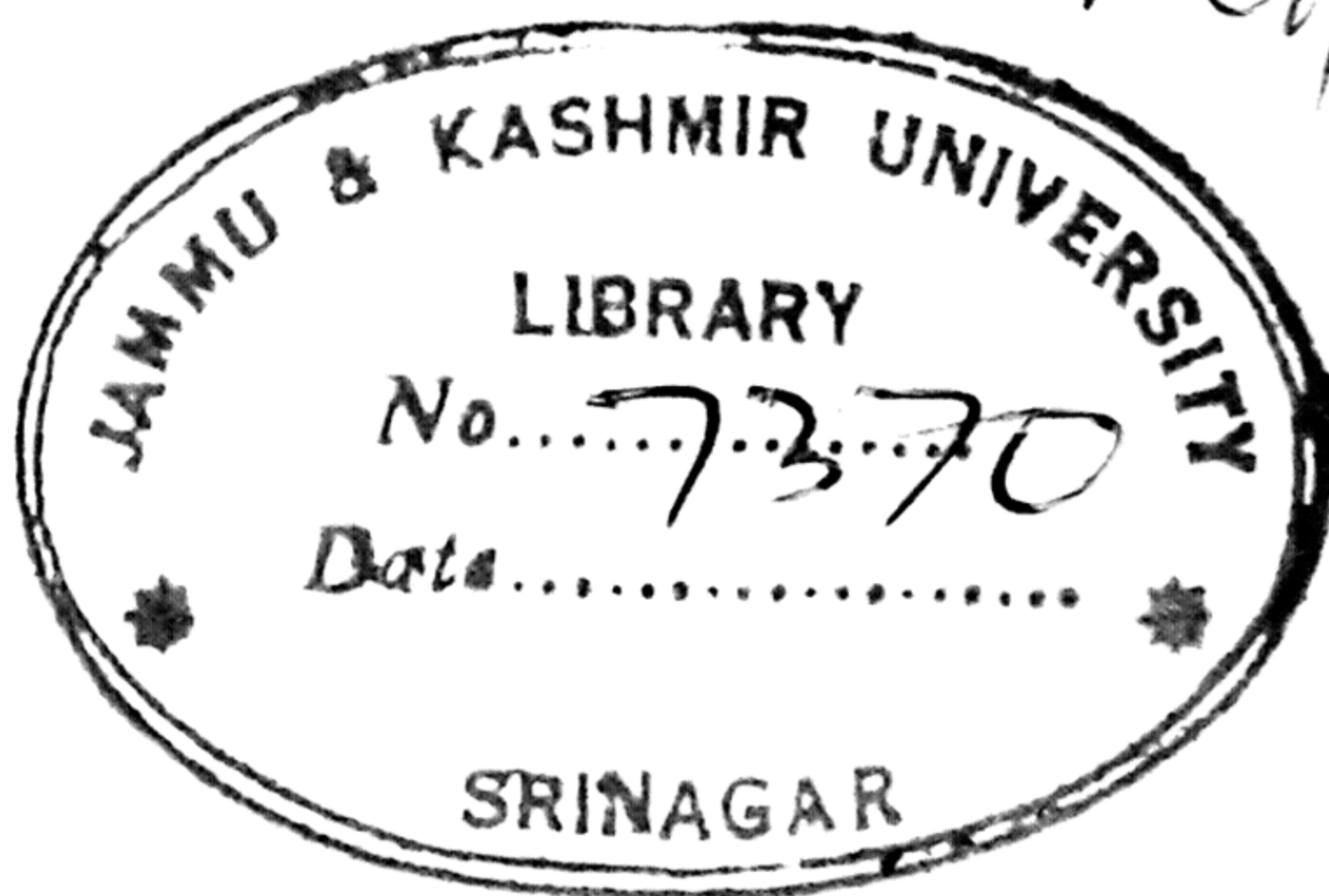
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CONTENTS

	Page
Robin Hood— <i>Alfred Noyes</i>	— 5
The Slippers of Cinderella <i>by W. G. Robertson</i>	— 22
The Princess and the Woodcutter— <i>A. A. Milne.</i>	— 54

ROBIN HOOD

By ALFRED NOYES

CHARACTERS

SCENE I

FIRST RUSTIC.
SECOND RUSTIC.
ROBIN HOOD.
THIRD RUSTIC.
THE SHERIFF.
WILL SCARLET.
THE KNIGHT.
Rustics and Outlaws.
The Sheriff's Guards.

SCENE II

JENNY, *Marian's maid.*
MAID MARIAN.
WIDOW SCARLET, *Will's mother.*
PRINCE JOHN.
WARMAN, *his man.*
ROBIN HOOD.
THE KNIGHT.
FRIAR TUCK.
WILL SCARLET.
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, *a Fool.*
Two servants of Prince John's.
Outlaws.

*Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake?
Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the brake,
Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,
Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy horn.*

*Robin Hood is here again: all his merry thieves
Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves,
Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.*

*Merry, merry England has kissed the lips of June:
All the wings of fairyland were here beneath the moon,
Like a flight of rose-leaves fluttering in a mist
Of opal and ruby and pearl and amethyst.*

*Merry, merry England is waking as of old
With eyes of blither hazel and hair of brighter gold:
For Robin Hood is here again beneath the bursting spray
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.*

From "Sherwood."

ROBIN HOOD

SCENE I

May-day. An open place (near Nottingham). A crowd of rustics and townsfolk assembling to see the execution of Will Scarlet.

First Rustic. A sad May-day ! Where yonder gallows
glowers,
We should have raised the May-pole.

Second Rustic. Ay, no songs,
No dancing on the green.

[Enter Robin Hood, disguised as an old beggar, with a green patch on one eye.]

Robin. Is this the place,
Masters, where they're agoin' to hang Will Scarlet?

First Rustic. Ay, father, more's the pity.

Robin. Eh, don't-ye think.
There may be scuffling, masters?

First Rustic. There's many here would swing a cudgel
and help.
To trip the Sheriff up. If Robin Hood
Were only here !

Third Rustic. They say Prince John is out
This very day, scouring thro' Sherwood Forest,
In quest of Lady Marian !

Robin [sharply]. You heard that ?

Third Rustic. Ay, for they say she's flown to Sherwood
Forest.

Second Rustic. She'd best beware then; for I saw
Prince John !

With these same eyes I saw him riding out
To Sherwood, not an hour ago.

Robin. You saw him ?

Second Rustic. Ay, and he only took three men-at-arms.

First Rustic. Three men-at-arms! Why, then, he must ha' known

That Robin's men would all be busy here!

I think there'll be some scuffling after all.

Robin. Ay, tell 'em so—go, spread it thro' the crowd !
[*He mutters to himself*].

He'd take some time to find her, but' fore God

We must be quick; 'fore God we must be quick !

Second Rustic. Why, father, one would never think to see thee

Thou hadst so sound a heart.

First Rustic. Ah, here they come !

The Sheriff and his men; and, in the midst,

There's poor Will Scarlet bound.

The Crowd. Ah, here they come !

First Rustic. There, there he is. His face is white;
but, Lord,

He takes it bravely.

Second Rustic. He's a brave man is Will.

Sheriff. Back with the crowd there, guards ; delay no time !

Some Women in the Crowd. Ah, ah, poor lad !

Robin (eagerly). What are they doing now?

I cannot see !

First Rustic. The Sheriff's angered now !

Second Rustic. Ay, for they say the hangman has not come.

Third Rustic. The Sheriff says he will not be delayed. But who will do the hanging then?

Robin. I have a thought; make way; let me bespeak The Sheriff!

Rustic. How now, father, what's to do?

Robin. Make way, I tell you. I'm the man they want!

Sheriff. What's this?

Robin. Good master Sheriff, I've a grudge Against Will Scarlet. Let me have the task Of sending him to heaven!

Crowd. Ah-h-h, the old devil!

Sheriff. Come on, then, and be brief!

Robin. I'am not a hangman;
But I can cleave your thinnest hazel wand
At sixty yards.

Sheriff. Shoot, then, and make an end.
Make way there, clear the way!

[*An opening is made in the crowd. Robin stands in the gap.*]

Crowd. Ah-h-h, the old devil!

Robin. I'll shoot him one on either side, just graze him.

To show you how I love him; then the third
Slick in his heart.

[*He shoots. A murmur goes up from the crowd.*]

Sheriff (angrily). Take care! You've cut the cord
That bound him on that side!

Robin. Then here's the second.

I will be careful. [He takes a steady aim.]

A Rustic to his Neighbours. I'faith, lads, he can shoot.

[*Robin shoots. A louder murmur goes up from the crowd*]

Sheriff. You have cut the rope again!

A cry. He has cut him free!

Robin. All right! All right! It's only to tease the dog.

Here's for the third now.

[He aims and shoots quickly. There is a loud cry of a wounded man; then a shout from the crowd.]

First Rustic. What has he done?

Second Rustic. He has killed

One of the Sheriff's men!

Sheriff. There's treachery here

I'll cleave the first man's heart that moves!

Robin. Will Scarlet,

Pick up the dead man's dagger!

Sheriff. Treachery! Help!

Down with the villain!

Robin [throws off his beggar's crouch and hurls the Sheriff and several of his men back amongst the crowd. His cloak drops off.] Sherwood! A merry Sherwood!

Rustics. Ah, ha! The Lincoln green! A Robin Hood!

[A bugle rings out and immediately some of the yokels throw off their disguise, and the Lincoln green appears as by magic amongst the crowd. The guards are rushed and hustled by them. Robin and several of his men make a ring round Will Scarlet.]

Sheriff. It is the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon:
There is a great reward upon his head.
Down with him!

[The Sheriff's men make a rush at the little band. A knight in jet-black armour, with a red-cross shield, suddenly appears and forces his way through the mob, sword in hand.]

Knight. What, so many against so few!
Back, you damned wolves. Now, foresters, follow me.

Up, cudgels, for our Saint George, and drive them all
Home to the devil!

[The foresters make a rush with him, and the Sheriff and his men take to flight.]

Robin. Now back to Sherwood, swiftly!

[He sees the Knight in armour standing by his horse.]

Your pardon, sir ; our debt to you is great,
Too great almost for thanks; but if you be
Bound by the vows of chivalry, I pray you
Lend me your charger; and my men will bring you
To my poor home in Sherwood. There you'll find
A most abundant gratitude.

Knight. Your name?

Robin. Was Huntingdon; but now is Robin Hood.

Knight. If I refuse?

Robin. Then, sir, I must perforce
Take him. I am an outlaw, but the law
Of manhood still constrains me. It is a matter
Of life or death.

Knight. Take him and God be with you.
I'll follow you to Sherwood with your men.

[Robin seizes the horse, leaps to the saddle, and gallops away.]

SCENE II

Sherwood Forest. Outside the cave, Jenny, Marian, and Widow Scarlet.

Marian. This dreadful waiting! Oh, I am selfish,
mother;
You need not be afraid. Robin will bring
Will Scarlet safely back. Jenny, how long
D'you think they've been away. The sun is high,
And all the dew is gone.

Jenny. Now don't you keep a-fretting. They'll be
back,

Quite soon enough. *[To Widow Scarlet.]*

Come, widow, come with me.

I'll give you my own corner in the hut
And make you cosy. If you take a nap,
Will Scarlet will be here betimes you wake.

[Takes her to the hut and shuts her in.]

There, drat her, for a mumping mumble-crust!

What's that? *[She pauses and stares at the bracken.]*

Marian. Why, Jenny, how you startled me!

Jenny. I thought I saw a face there in the ferns
Yonder—there—see, they are shaking still.

[She screams.]

Ah! Ah!

[Prince John and another man appear advancing across the glade.]

John. So here's my dainty tigress in her den.

[At a sign from Marian, Jenny goes quickly inside the cave.]

That's well! Dismiss your maid!

Warman, remove a little. *[His man retires.]*

I see you shrink

A little better of me. Out in the wood

There waits a palfrey for you, and the stirrup

Longs, as I long, to clasp your dainty foot.

[He draws nearer.]

Marian. Wait—I must think, must think.

John. Give me your hand!

Why do you shrink from me? If you could know
The fire that burns me night and day.

Marian. You are mad!

John.

Ay, mad for you.

[Jenny comes out of the cave and hands Marian a bow. She leaps back and aims it at John.]

Marian. Back, you wild beast, or by the heaven above us,

I'll kill you! Now, don't doubt me. I can shoot Truly as any forester. I swear,

Prince or no prince, king or no king, I'll kill you If you should stir one step from where you stand.

John. I was beside myself, was carried away. I cannot help my love for——

Marian.

I'll not hear

Another sickening word: throw down your arms, That dagger at your side.

John.

Marian, I swear——

Marian. You see that rusty stain.

Upon the silver birch down yonder? watch.

[She shoots. Then swiftly aims at him again.]

Now, throw your weapon down.

[He pulls out the dagger and throws it down, with a shrug of his shoulders. One of his men steals up behind Marian.]

Jenny. There's one behind you! Look!

[The man springs forward and seizes Marian's arms.]

John *[coming forward and taking hold of her also].* So, my sweet tigress,

You're trapped, then, are you? Well, we'll waste no time!

We'll talk this over when we reach the castle.

Keep off the maid, there, Warman; I can manage

This turbulent beauty. Ah, by God, you shall

Come! Ah! God's blood, what's this?

[Marian has succeeded in drawing her dagger and slightly wounding him. She wrests herself free.]

Marian. Keep back, I warn you !

John *[advancing slowly.]* Strike, now strike if you will.
You will not like

To see the red blood spurting up your hand.

That's not maid's work. Come, strike !

[Robin Hood appears at the edge of the glade behind him.]

You see, you cannot !

Your heart is tenderer than you think.

Robin *[quietly]*.

Prince John.

John *[turns round and confronts Robin]*. Out with your blade, Warman.

[Robin draws his sword and sets his back to an oak. The other two followers of Prince John come out of the wood.]

Robin.

Come on, all four !

You must be tired of fighting women-folk.

Come on ! By God, sir, you must guard your head
Better than that, *[He disarms Warman.]*

Or you're just food for worms

Already; come, you dogs !

John.

Work round, you three,

Behind him ! Drive him out from that damned oak !

Robin. Oh, that's a princely speech ! Have at you,
sir !

[He strikes Prince John's sword out of his hand, and turns suddenly to confront the others. John picks up a dagger and makes as if to stab Robin in the back. At the same instant bugles are heard in the distance. The red-cross knight flashes between the trees, and seizing John's arms in his gauntleted hand, disarms him, then turns to help Robin.]

Knight. What, four on one ! Down with your blades,
you curs,

Or, by Mahound !—

[*The three men take to flight. John stands staring at the new-comer. The foresters appear, surrounding the glade.*]

John (*muttering*). What? Thou? Thou? Or his ghost?

No—no—it cannot be.

Robin.

Let them yelp home.

All's well; but take this villain into the cave

And guard him there.

[*The foresters lead Prince John into the cave.*]

John [*to the foresters*]. Answer me one thing; who is yonder red-cross knight?

A Forester.

No friend of thine,

Whoever he be !

Knight (*to Robin*). I need not ask *his* name.

I grieve to know it !

Robin.

Sir, I am much beholden

To your good chivalry. What thanks is mine

To give is all your own.

Knight.

Then I ask this !

Give me that prisoner ! I think *his* life is mine !

Robin. You saved my own, and more, you saved much more

Than my poor life is worth. But, sir, think well

This man is dangerous, not to me alone,

But to the King of England.

Knight. I have more reasons than you know.

Robin.

So be it.

Bring back the prisoner !

[*The foresters bring Prince John back. He stares at the knight as if in fear.*]

Sir, you shall judge him.

This prisoner is your own.

Knight.

Then—let him go!

Foresters. What! Set him free?

Robin.

Obey!

[*They release Prince John.*]

Knight.

Out of my sight;

Go!

Prince John. What man is this?

Knight.

Quickly, get thee gone!

[*Prince John goes out shaken and white.*]

Robin. We'll think no more of him! It is our rule
That every friend we met in merry greenwood
Should dine with us. Will you not be our guest?

Knight. That's a most happy thought! I have not
heard.

Robin.

Will you not raise your visor
And let us know to whose good knightly hand
We are so beholden?

Knight.

Sir, you will pardon me.

If, for a little I remain unknown.

But, tell me, are you not that Robin Hood

Who breaks the forest's laws?

Robin.

That is my name.

We hold this earth as naturally our own

As the glad common air we breathe. We think

No man, no king, can so usurp the world

As not to give us room to free lives,

But, if you shrink from eating the King's deer——

Knight. Shrink? Ha! ha! ha! I count it as my
own.

[*The foresters appear, preparing the dinner on a table of green
turfs beneath a spreading oak. Marian and Jenny*

appear at the door of the hut. Jenny goes across to help at the preparations for dinner.]

Robin. Ah, there's my Lady Marian! Will you not come.

And speak with her?

[He and the Knight go and talk Marian in the back-ground.]

Little John [at the table]. The trenchers all are set;
Manchetts of wheat, cream, curds, and honey-cakes,
Vension pasties, roasted pigeons! Much,
Run to the cave; we'll broach our rarest wine.
To-day.

[Enter Friar Tuck with several more foresters and Will Scarlet.]

Robin. Will Scarlet! And all in time for dinner!
Go into the hut. Thy mother is waiting there.
Put thy big arm around her.

[Will Scarlet goes into the hut with a cry.]

Mother!

Friar Tuck.

You see,

My sons, you couldn't expect the lad to run!
There is a certain looseness in the limbs,
A quaking of the flesh that overcomes
The bravest who has felt a hangman's rope
Cuddling his neck.

Robin. You judge him by the rope
That cuddles your slim waist! Oh, you sweet armful,
Sit down and pant! I warrant you were glad
To bear him company.

Friar Tuck.

I'll not deny it!

I am a man of solids. Like the Church,
I am founded on a rock.

(He sits down.)

Robin.

Solids, i' faith!

Sir, it is true he is partly based on beef;
 He grapples with it squarely; but fluids, too,
 Have played their part in that cathedral choir
 He calls his throat. One godless virtue, sir,
 They seem to have given him. Never a nightingale
 Gurgles jug! jug! in mellower tones than he
 When jugs are flowing. Never a thrush can pipe
 Sweet, sweet, so rarely as, when a pipe of wine
 Summers his throttle, we'll make him sing to us
 One of his heathen ditties—*The Malmsey Butt,*
 Or *Down the Merry Red Lane!*

Jenny [approaching]. Please you, sirs, all is ready!
Friar Tuck. Ah, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny, that's good news!
 [Will Scarlet comes out of the hut with arm round his mother.
 They all sit down at the table of turfs.]

[Enter Shadow-of-a leaf-timidly.]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Is there a place for me?

A Forester.

Ay, come along!

Friar Tuck. Now, Robin, don't forget the grace, my son.

Robin [standing up.] It is our custom, sir, since our repast

Is borrowed from the King, to drain one cup
 To him, and his return from the Crusade,
 Before we dine. That same wine-bibbing friar
 Calls it our "grace"; and constitutes himself
 Remembrancer—without a cause, for never.

Have we forgotten, never while bugles ring
 Thro' Sherwood, shall forget—Outlaws, the King!

[All stand up except the Knight.]

Cries. The King and his return from the Crusade!

[They drink and resume their seats.]

Robin. You did not drink the health, sir Knight,
I hope

You hold with Lion-heart.

Knight.

Yes; I hold with him.

You were too quick for me. I had not drawn.

These gauntlets off.

But tell me, Lady Marian.

When is your bridal day with Robin Hood?

Marian. We shall be wedded when the King comes
home

From the Crusade.

Knight.

Ah, when the King comes home!

That's music—all the birds of April sing

In those four words for me—the King comes home.

Marian. I am glad you love him, sir.

Robin.

But you're not eating!

Your helmet's locked and barred. Will you not raise
Your visor?

Knight. Or lose my dinner! Hunger and thirst

Break down all masks and all disguises, Robin.

[*He rises and removes his helmet, revealing the face of Richard
Coeur de Lion.*]

Robin. The King!

[*They all leap to their feet.*]

Outlaws.

The King! The King!

Robin.

But oh, my liege

I should have known, at the rescue of Will Scarlet,
When we were so outnumbered and hard beset,
And you came riding out of the Eastern sky,
I should have known, either it was Saint George
Or else the King come home from the Crusade.

Richard. A lover's instinct might have told you,
Robin,

If, as I understand, it means so much
To you and Lady Marian. Huntingdon,
Your earldom we restore to you this day.
You and my Lady Marian shall return
To court with us, where your true bridal troth
Shall be fulfilled with golden marriage bells.
Now, friends, the venison pasty. We must hear
The Malmsey Butt and *Down the Merry Red Lane*.

Shadow-of-a-leaf. Don't leave the forest. There's
darker things to come.

Robin. Pardon him, sire. Poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf
has lost

His mortal wits.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Sire, you will pardon me,
For I am only a fool, and yet, methinks,
You know not half the meaning of those words—
The King, the King comes home from the Crusade!
Thrust up your swords, hilt uppermost, my lads,
And shout—the King comes home from the Crusade.

[*He leaps on a seat, and thrusts up the King's sword, hilt
uppermost, as if it were a cross.*]

CURTAIN

THE SLIPPERS OF CINDERELLA

By W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON

CHARACTERS

MYRA TREMAINE.

POLLY TREMAINE,

DOLLY TREMAINE,

JIMMY TREMAINE.

BELINDA TREMAINE.

AGATHA-NEXT-DOOR.

JANE.

ELIZA.

THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.

} *Twins.*

THE SLIPPERS OF CINDERELLA

SCENE.—*A very shabby parlour. At back is a curtained window on one side of which stands a book-case, on the other a grandfather clock stopped at twenty minutes past eleven. A fireplace R. with mirror over mantelpiece. Doors R. and L. Myra, a tall girl of fourteen, sits at a table mending Jimmy's coat while he stands in his shirt-sleeves watching the operation. Belinda sits on a stool by the fire absorbed in a book. The curtains are drawn and the room lit. It is about five o'clock on the 31st of October.*

Myra. There. That's the best I can do with it. Really, Jimmy, any one would think that you walked on your elbows.

Jimmy [*putting on coat*]. Thanks awfully. Does it look very patchy?

Myra. Not so bad. You must try and keep full face when there's company and sit with your back to the wall.

Jimmy. I don't do much sitting in these knickers; they're at their last gasp.

Myra. I suppose we're a very discontented family. When we had all the nice things we didn't particularly notice them; now we haven't got them we miss them dreadfully.

Jimmy. It's not so much having no nice things as having nasty ones that I object to.

Belinda [*holding out her frock*]. I know. I never cared for this when it was Myra's, and when it was cut up for Dolly I hated it. Now it's mine I simply loathe it.

Jimmy. At any rate you don't run the risk of going off with a bang whenever you sit down.

[*Walks drearily to the window, draws aside curtain and stares into the darkness.*]

What time will the Old Dears be back Ma?

Myra. I don't quite know; mother said she would telegraph. O Jimmy, I do hope to goodness that father gets this appointment.

Jimmy. Estate agent to Lord What's-his-name, isn't it?

Myra. Yes. What exactly are the duties of an estate agent, Jimmy?

Jimmy. Oh—you wear riding breeches, you know, and—well, you tell the other fellows to do the rest.

Belinda. I'm sure father could do that beautifully.

Myra. And it would show off his nice legs. I've always recommended the ballet or a bishopric.

Jimmy. I suppose it wouldn't exactly restore the fallen fortunes of our house?

Myra. Not quite, of course, but we should be in the country again, and poor Jane would be able to remember whether she's nurse or parlourmaid or cook. [*Enter B. Polly and Dolly in hats and coats. They carry satchels, which they throw down.*] Hullo, Tweenies—late, aren't you?

Polly. Not particularly. It's so dark; there's a fog coming on, I think.

Dolly. A good, thick, yellow one. Ugh. [*Shivers.*] [*The twins take off hats and coats and throw them down.*] And lots of the girls have got parties. It's Hallowe'en, you know.

Belinda. O Dolly—Hallowe'en, when all the fairies are abroad?

Polly. Little silly, with your fairies.

Dolly. What are you stodging over? [*Looking over Belinda's shoulder*] Cinderella, of course.

Myra. Fairies won't come our way, I'm afraid. Now, children, you must clear away all that litter [*pointing to coats*] and then try to get yourselves decently clean.

Twins [*open-mouthed*]. Clean? Whatever for?

Myra. Have you forgotten high tea and Aunt Maria?

Jimmy. I say, Myra—it isn't *this* evening?

Polly. And the Old Dears away, and just us—we, I mean?

Myra. It is—worse luck. She's going to take me to a lecture.

Jimmy. Oughtn't we to have run to dinner for aunt? She's one of the idle rich, you know.

Myra. The lecture's early: besides, I thought high tea rather a good touch; hospitable, yet without the opulence of dinner.

Jimmy. Filling, but not fashionable, eh?

Polly. What's the lecture about?

Myra. Economy.

Dolly. What is economy?

Myra. I believe it teaches you how to spend very little money.

Jimmy. We don't find much difficulty in doing *that*. Now, if it taught you how to spend a great deal of money when you haven't got any, then there'd be sense in it.

Myra. I'm not sure, but I can't help fancying that father looks to Aunt Maria to do that.

Twins. Aunt Maria?

Myra. She's tremendously rich, you know. Simply frightfully. And you see, if she took a fancy to one of us—

Jimmy. Or even two—we could offer the pair of twins at a reduction.

Dolly. Oh, do chuck it, Jimmy. I don't know why there should be anything absurd about being a twin—but there is.

Polly. Yes. You needn't rub it in.

Jimmy. Well, unless I'm much mistaken she'll go in for quality, not quantity. A stalwart nephew to support her tottering steps will about fill her bill, I should say.

Myra. Or a sensible, elderly niece who would be a companion to her.

Belinda. Or a dear little girl to brighten her declining—oh, don't, Jimmy.

[*Jimmy shies a cushion at her.*]

Polly. But why Aunt Maria *now*? She has hardly ever come near us.

Jimmy. She doesn't like us; and she's only a half aunt really, you know.

Belinda. O Jimmy, how dreadful. Which half?

Jimmy. Shut up.

Myra. She saw Jimmy and me when we were little and loathed us; now, I suppose, she's coming back with a fresh eye to see if she likes us any better.

Jimmy [*gloomily*]. She won't.

Myra. No, I don't suppose she will. Of course, from the pathetic point of view, we should have made a better show as orphans.

Dolly. We can't very well work that.

Myra. Hardly, with a brace of parents in robust health on the premises. If we only knew her tastes we could play up better.

Polly. If we each take a different line she may find one of us sympathetic.

Myra. Good idea, Polly. Now—who shall be what? How about the Tweenies?

Jimmy. One can be pretty and the other good.

Polly. Bags I being pretty.

Dolly. No, Polly, you're ever so much better than I am. I'll be pretty.

Jimmy. Toss up—your call, Polly.

Polly. Heads.

Jimmy [*tossing a penny*]. Tails. Dolly's pretty, you're good. Then there must be a clever one who

swots over lessons—auntie may like that sort—and we ought to have an angel child.

Myra. I'm the clever one, I suppose; that leaves Belinda for the angel child.

Jimmy. Belinda, forward please.

Belinda. [*advancing bashfully*]. O Jimmy——.

Jimmy [*sternly*]. No back answers. You'll be sitting at the window, your wistful gaze fixed upon the distant hills.

Belinda. You can't see anything but chimney pots from the window—and it's pitch dark.

Jimmy. S-sh. And when she comes in you'll look up with a sad smile.

Myra. Let's try it once over and see how it works out. [*Group formed. Belinda at window, Myra sitting at table, and the twins gracefully posed at her feet.*] I ought to be reading aloud something improving.

Jimmy [*at bookcase*]. Try *Flowering plants of Great Britain*: some of the words in that are a fair treat. Catch. [*Myra fields a heavy volume with difficulty.*] Now—picture; the Poor but Virtuous Family. H'm-m Not bad. Why are you making those silly faces, Dolly?

Dolly. I 'am looking pretty; you told me to.

Jimmy. Better cut out the prettiness—it would put any aunt off. That's better. Don't grin, Belinda.

Belinda. You told me to. That's the sad smile.

Jimmy. Cut out the sad smile. What utter poops you girls are. You've no more notion of—I say, here is somebody! Now then, Myra,—and don't look up, any one, when the door opens. Let it all soak in.

Myra [*reading*]. 'In plants of the Umbelliferous Tribe the floral leaves, grown in a whorl and forming what is termed an Involucre, often grow at the base of the general and partial umbels—

[*Jane appears at door.*]

Jane. If you please, Miss Myra, could I speak to you for a minute?

Myra. Jane! *Not* the Kitchen flue?

Jane. No, miss.

Myra. Then I can bear it. What's the matter?

Jane. Nothing, miss, leastways no more than usual; but was you wishful that I should be dressed for the door seeing I'm to dish up the minute your aunt comes and everything so to speak trembling in the balance?

Myra. O, Jane, I'm afraid so. Mother made such a point of it.

Jane. Then 'Eaven 'help the lemon soles, miss, that's all I can say. No, Miss Myra, I can open a door with any one in the land, and I can cook you a sole as wouldn't have disgraced yours Pa's table in the Dogwood Park days, but I can't do'em both at once and keep my reason, and so I tell you.

Myra [*rising, and taking Jane's hand*]. Jane, dear, we must forget the Dogwood Park days. We've all come down in the world now, and you were a dear old silly to come with us.

Jane [*tearfully*]. And do I ever complain, Miss Myra? Do I mind being engaged as a General and doing the work of a Commander-in-Chief? Do I mind sleeping in what you may well call the pantry, for pant you do with a window the size of a sixpence, and arm-in-arm with the boiler—but dress for the door and leave them blessed soles, lemon though they be, and never would Mrs. Silverside have allowed such things to breathe the air of Dogwood Park while *she* was housekeeper. Well, Mis Myra, we lives and we learns, and I *may* learn to be in two places at once and do a dozen things at the same time—I may or I may *not*, but— [*Myra looks anxiously at Jane and sniffs suspiciously. Jane sniffs.*] Something burning? There! If I turn my back half a minute—though I suppose we should reckon it as one of the blessings of living in a rabbit hutch; what's done in the kitchen you smell in the attic.

[*She dashes from the room.*]

Myra [laughing]. Poor, dear Jane. I always smell burning when she gets a little long-winded; it sends her off like a shot. But now, seriously, children, this is *my* evening, and the important question is—what *am* I to wear? Mother particularly said that it was to be “quiet and appropriate”. What would be appropriate for an Economy Lecture?

Jimmy. Your oldest frock, or none at all, I should say.

Myra. But you couldn't call that quiet. As a fact, I haven't got anything. Agatha-next-Door offered me the loan of a purple velvet trimmed with swansdown, but I thought *not*.

Dolly. What on earth made you tell *her* about it?

Jimmy. If there is one thing beastlier than the general beastliness of everything it's the continued patronage of Agatha-next-Door.

Polly. And her habit of “dropping to play with us,” as she puts it.

Dolly. At all hours.

Myra. She's really quite a good sort, and it's nice of her to offer her frocks. The mere fact that [one wouldn't be found dead in them ought not to weigh with us. But I *do* wish that I had something decent.

Dolly. What we want is a little woman to come in.

Belinda. [suddenly]. What we want is a fairy godmother.

All [in scorn]. A fairy godmother.

Belinda. Yes, and the Old Dears ought to have seen about it long ago.

Myra. Belinda, you are not to call father and mother the Old Dears. I've told you over and over again.

Belinda. But you and Jimmy—oh!

Jimmy [shying another cushion]. Shut it, Belinda.

Myra. All the same there's something in the idea. The fairy godmother would merely wave her wand and there should I be, "quiet and appropriate."

Polly. And a lovely motor to take you to the lecture.

Myra. And a splendid person to open the door in a gold-laced coat and canary-coloured knee-breeches.

Dolly. My dear Myra, Jane would die first.

Myra. [*laughing*]. So she would: I forgot Jane. Well, then, a beautiful Greek maiden in flowing raiment and wreathed with roses.

Jimmy. And the high tea. Peacock pasties, haunches of vension, grapes, pineapples—my eye!

Myra. Ah, Jimmy, I'm afraid that fairy days are over. It is not for us poor moderns to stand in the slippers of Cinderella. [*A knock at the door.*]

Polly [*in horror*]. Not aunt? Not yet?

A Voice [*without*]. May I come in?

Jimmy. Worse. Agatha. [*Shouting*]. Oh, come in [*Enter Agatha, a very pretty girl, but showily and badly dressed.*]

Agatha. Jane had the poor door open, so I thought I would just drop in to——

Jimmy. I know. To play with us. We are feeling particularly sportive this evening. Let me introduce Miss Myra Tremaine, the champion Kiss-in-the-Ring player, and Miss Belinda Tremaine, who holds the cup for Hop Scotch.

Myra [*taking Agatha's hand and looking her up and down*]. Dear me, Agatha, another smart frock. You look like a bridesmaid.

Polly. Sorry to disappoint you, but Belinda's engagement to the Archbishop of Canterbury is off.

Dolly. Because she objects to his smoking all over the house.

Agatha [*sinking into a chair and holding out her frock*]. This smart? My dear, my maid ran this up for me ages ago: it's as old as the hills and washes like a rag. By the bye,

I came upon something that might be useful to you for to-night. I know you're such a one for the quiet shades. It's that very soft tone of pink; frazy crazy the French call it.

Myra [puzzled]. What? Oh, I see. Fraise écrasée—crushed strawberry. It's ever so kind of you, Agatha dear, but you really mustn't trouble.

Agatha. Trouble's a pleasure, I'm sure. My little maid shall run for it—she's waiting outside. [Calling] Faites monter le carton, Elise—tut—stupid of me. It seems so natural to speak to one's fum de chambre in French. [Calling] Bring up the box I left in our hall, Elise.

Jimmy. What's your—er—fum de chambre doing here?

Agatha. She came round with me, of course; mamma would not dream of letting me go out unattended. So you are entertaining this evening?

Myra. Only Lady Errington.

Agatha [eagerly]. Lady Errington?

Polly. That's Aunt Maria.

Agatha. Lady Errington Oh—but oughtn't you to smarten up a bit? With a yard or two of art muslin and a few pins I could make this a different room. Mamma always says I am such a one for the delicate touches. Have you got the right cards to the top in the card plate?

Dolly. We haven't a card plate.

Polly. And only the sweep's card to put in it if we had.

Agatha. Ah, well, you're new-comers, you see, and perhaps we *are* a little exclusive. How would it be if I stayed to dinner so as to give a tone and to show her ladyship that you visit with the *better* houses in the neighbourhood?

Jimmy. But next door is just like this house.

Agatha [gently.] We come at the end of the row, you see, dear. That makes us Semi-detached, doesn't it?

Myra [smiling]. And is that very distinguished? We're dreadfully ignorant.

Agatha. Well, after the Semi you come to the Detached—in gardens—and there you practically touch the Country.

Myra. Do you?

Agatha. At any rate the Landed Gentry. [A knock. Enter a very small child in cap and apron, carrying a large dress box]. There. Now we'll just have a peep and then you must let Elise get you into it. So much depends upon the way a thing's worn.

Myra. Oh, but—please, Agatha, I couldn't think of troubling—er—Elise.

Agatha. My dear, what has she to do? A little light fancy work——

Eliza [anxiously]. Please, miss——

Agatha. A little lace to mend—what is it, Elise?

Eliza. If you please, miss, I was to get back to the potatoes the very minute you'd finished with me.

Agatha [hastily]. Open the box at once, Elise. There! [An appalling garment is disclosed]. Now, won't that be just the thing? Dressy, you know, and yet only a simple little demi-toilette.

[*Myra* gazes in stricken silence, then kisses *Agatha*.]

Myra. Thank you, Agatha. It's wonderful. It's—it's wonderful. Isn't it, girls?

Awed Chorus. Quite—quite wonderful.

Myra. And I'm sure it would be just right for some occasions——

Jimmy [very politely]. The Fifth of November, for instance.

Myra. Jimmy! But I'm afraid it's a little too smart for me.

Agatha. Ah, but wait till you see it on. Take the box upstairs, Elise.

[*Agatha opens door L. for Eliza, who staggers out with box*].

Jimmy [softly]. Myra, you can't. You'd look like a sweep on May-day.

Myra. Of course I can't, but we mustn't hurt her feelings.

Agatha [at door]. Come along, Myra.

Myra [to *Jimmy*]. You come too, and we'll work it somehow.

Agatha [archly]. Yes, Mr. Jimmy, you come too and give your opinion. We all know how particular the gentlemen are.

[*Exeunt Myra, Agatha, and Jimmy, L.*]

Polly [giggling]. " 'The gentlemen.' Why not 'gents' " ?

Dolly. "There you touch the County."

Belinda [looking up suddenly from her book]. Brutes, both of you.

Polly. Brutes?

Belinda. She's nice and kind and pretty, and you're always horrid to her. And Myra told you to clear up the room and wash yourselves.

Polly. Well—I—never.

Dolly. For the first time I realize the feelings of Balaam.

Polly [severely]. Belinda clears up the room for sheer, unprovoked cheek.

Dolly [twitching away *Belinda's* book]. Step lively, Belinda.

Belinda [rising]. All right. I don't mind. I may as well fag for you as for Jimmy. [She takes up *Polly's* coat. Three small objects fall from the pocket]. Hullo Chestnuts. [Picking them up]. Only three?

Dolly. Hand them over. We'll roast them now—there'll be one each. [She arranges the three chestnuts on the bars of the grate.] That's mine, that's *Polly's*, and that's *Belinda's*—if she behaves herself.

Polly. One of the girls gave them to me because it's Hallowe'en. I forget why.

Dolly [kneeling on the rug]. I know. If your chestnut pops and jumps off the bar you get a wish—your "heart's desire," as some silly book calls it. What's your heart's desire? *Polly.*

Polly [with a sigh]. I couldn't possibly stuff 'em into one chestnut; I've got so many.

Dolly [clearing the fire with the poker]. So have I. And of course it is all nonsense: Jane might just as well expect to get her heart's desire from a lemon sole.

Belinda. Dolly, you mustn't talk like that on Hallowe'en. It's the great fairy night, and I'm sure we ought to wish.

Polly. Well, there's your chestnut. Wish away and see what your fairies can do for you.

Belinda [with closed eyes and tightly clenched hands]. Then I wish—oh, I *do* wish—that a fairy godmother would appear and give us *all* our wishes. Why shouldn't she come to us as well as to Cinderella? *She* only wanted to go to a silly ball; *we* want such lots of things. [*The room darkens and a loud pop is heard.*]

Polly. There goes a chestnut. Whose is it?

Dolly [raking among the ashes]. Belinda's, I think. What's wrong with the light? I can hardly see.

Belinda. It is mine. O Polly, you—you don't *really* think that anything's going to happen, do you? I almost wish that we *hand't* wished.

[*The room darkens still more, leaving only the dull glow of the fire.*]

Dolly [looking nervously round]. Don't be absurd, child. It's—it's some stupid trick of Jimmy's, I expect.

[*A sound of music is heard; soft, rippling arpeggios which seem to come from immense distance.*]

Polly [loudly]. Stop it, Jimmy. We're not a bit frightened. [*Clinging to Dolly.*] O—oh, Dolly.

[*The music sounds nearer and now voices can be heard, faint but shrill, blent in a wild, wordless chant. The three children huddle together on the hearth-rug*].

Dolly.—O—oh—look there.

[*Out of the darkness grows a pale silvery light. The window curtains wave as if in a strong gale, then sweep aside disclosing the tiny, shining figure of the Fairy. She wears a long red robe and a steeple-crowned hat; her little face is that of a child, but long grey hair flows over her shoulders, and she leans upon a crutch of ebony. She peers into the room with drowsy eyes while the music sinks to a whisper, then ceases*].

Fairy [*in a faint, far-away voice*]. Who calls upon the Name Forgotten? Who wakes the Faerie from their dream?

Belinda. We—we didn't know you were asleep. We're so sorry.

Fairy. What should we do but sleep in a world which knows us no longer? My eyes are grown dim. [*She draws from her robe and puts on a huge pair of horn spectacles.*] Are you not my little Cinderella?

Belinda. Please—I'm Belinda, please.

Fairy [*peering at her*]. I know not Belinda. But [*passing her hand over her brows.*] I have slumbered long. [*Her eyes fall upon the prostrate twins.*] And these—these should be your sisters. [*Shaking her crutch with a menacing gesture.*] Ugly and cruel, doubtless.

Belinda [*hastily*]. Yes, they're my sisters. But they aren't ugly—at least, not particularly—and they're quite nice.

Twins [*piteously*]. Oh, we are—we really are, dear Fairy: quite.

Fairy. Then what ails the child? Has the king, your father, brought you home a cruel step mother?

Polly. Mother is quite well, thank you.

Dolly. And father isn't a king.

Fairy. Strange. Strange. Then perchance he is a poor woodcutter?

Belinda. He's poor, but he isn't a woodcutter.

Polly. He wants to be an estate agent.

Fairy. I know not the estate agent. Is it a noble calling?

Dolly. They look after land, I think.

Fairy. Ah, the Governor of a Province. A modest ambition truly, and he shall attain it. [*She waves her crutch.*] He is an estate agent from henceforth. [*To Belinda.*] And now for you, my child. What boon would you ask of the Faerie?

Belinda [*overcoming her nervousness and advancing a few steps*]. Oh, dear Fairy, it isn't for me—it's for Myra.

Fairy. Myra?

Belinda. She's my eldest sister, you know.

Fairy. The Princess Royal? Yes.

Belinda. She's going out to-night with Aunt Maria, and she hasn't a single decent frock.

Fairy. Is she good and true, this Myra?

Belinda. She's a perfect dear.

Dolly. Everybddy likes Myra.

Fairy. Then to-night she shall be fairest of the fair. Shall hers be the robe that blazes like the sun, that shines like the moon, or that glisters like the stars?

Polly. I think—if you wouldn't mind something a little quieter.

Dolly. Yes, she said "quiet and appropriate."

Fairy. Modest and wise Myra. White shall be her raiment; white as the Dawn before the Sun has kissed her. What more?

Belinda. Well—if she *could* have something to take her to the hall.

Polly. A taxi, you know——

Dolly. Or even the station fly——

Fairy. A suitable equipage. Good.

Belinda. Then—what was it she wanted for poor Jane?

Polly. A neat gown to open the door in.

Fairy. A bower maiden in fair apparel. Yes. But you have then bidden guests hither? I will transform this hovel to halls of splendour.

[*Raises her crutch.*]

Dolly [*hastily*]. No, no, please. You mustn't. This is a furnished house—and we mayn't transform anything.

Polly. They won't even let us shift the bookcase.

Fairy. Then at least I will provide a banquet.

Belinda [*doubtfully*]. We've got lemon soles.

Polly. Of course, a cold chicken *would* be nice.

Fairy [*sharply*]. Tut, tut. Leave that to me, child.

Polly. I beg your pardon, dear Fairy—and we're ever so much obliged. Now Agatha-Next-Door won't be able to wave her frightful frocks at Myra any more.

Fairy. What is this malapert Agatha that she should taunt the Lady Myra? Shall I cause toads to fall from her lips with her every word?

Belinda. Oh no, *please* don't.

Polly [*regretfully*]. Perhaps it would be better not. She never leaves off talking, so the place would be *full* of toads.

Dolly. And she doesn't exactly taunt, you know, only she has such heaps of frocks and there's Myra without one to her back.

Fairy. This at least shall be remedied.

[*She describes a circle round herself in the air with her crutch, then with arms uplifted, she chants.*]

This to That and That to This,
One shall find what one shall miss :
Black to white and white to black,
This shall gain what That shall lack ;
This shall lose what That shall hold
Till the strokes of twelve be told—a—ah !

[As she speaks the last line she totters as if faint.]

Children. Oh, what is it ? Aren't you well ?

[The Fairy recovers herself and stands leaning on her crutch, but her speech is faint and breathless.]

Fairy. I have spoken no Spell this many a day. Now the Great Words come slowly to my lips and my feet falter on the Ancient Way. I am weary, my children : let me go.

[The brightness about her begins to fade.]

Polly. We are so sorry that you should have tired yourself for us.

Dolly. But, dear Fairy, why are you so old and weak ? I thought that Fairies were always young and dancing in the moonbeams.

[The far-away music sounds again as the Fairy answers slowly.]

Fairy. We are the world's first babies, dear ; the children of its youth and innocence ; now it grows grim and overwise and cares to play with us no longer. It is falling —falling, the twilight of the fairies : soon the midsummer moon will look on us no more.

[There is now only a pale glimmer of light round the little figure.]

Polly. Oh—she's going.

Dolly. She's putting herself out.

Belinda *[darting forward]*. One minute, please, Fairy ! Must Myra be careful about twelve o'clock—like Cinderella, you know ?

[Through the shadows the last words of the Fairy fall faintly].

Fairy. This shall lose what That shall hold
Till the strokes of twelve be told.

[Complete darkness. The music once more swells to a chorus of wild voices, then dies away to a mere breath—the sigh of an Aeolian harp. Suddenly the room flashes again into brightness: the normal atmosphere has again returned, the window curtains are closed and the Fairy has vanished].

Belinda. “Till the strokes of twelve be told:” That means till twelve o’clock, doesn’t it?

Polly [dreamily]. I suppose so.

Belinda. They’ll be home long before that, but I’m glad I remembered to ask. Aunt Maria would be dreadfully annoyed to find herself bouncing down High Street in a pumpkin.

Polly [suddenly]. Dolly—pinch me. Harder. I *can’t* be awake.

Dolly. Polly—then it really did happen? It’s true?

Polly. The—the Fairy? I—suppose so.

Belinda [clapping her hands and skipping]. Of course it’s true, and we’ve got all these nice things for Myra. A fly to take her to the lecture.

Polly. A cold chicken—that was *my* idea——

Belinda. A new frock.

Dolly. I suppose the—[looking nervously over her shoulder] the old lady knows the sort of thing that girls wear now?

Polly. She said “white”: you can’t go far wrong with plain white. When will this Spell affair begin to work?

Dolly. Don’t talk as if it were a mustard poultice. Almost at once, I should think. I wonder that we haven’t heard cries of joy already.

Polly. S-sh. Listen.

[A distant commotion is heard, voices raised in alarm, the upsetting of chairs, a door violently slammed. Hurried footsteps draw near, and Eliza bursts in L. and dashes across to the opposite door. She is pale and breathless.]

Dolly and Belinda. What is it ?

Polly [between Eliza and the door R.]. What's the matter ?

Eliza [wildly]. Don't you stop me—I wouldn't stay another minute in this house, not—not if it was ever so. Don't you stop me, Miss Polly !

[She slips past Polly and out R. As the children stare at each other the front door is heard to bang.]

Dolly. Can anything be wrong upstairs ?

Polly. Perhaps I'd better go and see.

Dolly. Wait—here comes some one else. Agatha !

[Agatha runs in L., a terrified and dishevelled Agatha, dressed only in her bodice and patticoat. Her hair, freed from ribbons and combs, falls over her shoulders ; all her affectations have vanished ; she is a pretty and pathetic little figure.]

Agatha [in a choked voice]. Girls—I—I didn't leave my clothes down here, did I ?

Polly. Clothes ? Of course not.

Dolly. What on earth has happened ?

Agatha. I—I don't know. Oh, poor Myra ! [Covering her face with her hands.] I believe I'm going out of my mind.

Dolly [severely]. You've gone out of quite enough already, seems to me. Where's your frock ?

Agatha. I—I don't know.

Polly. Don't know ?

Agatha [wildly]. Oh, don't ask questions or I shall scream ! Who's that ? [The door L. bursts open and Jimmy runs in. Agatha rushes to him.] Jimmy. Is she any better ?

Jimmy [*panting*]. Worse. It's awful. Why did you cut away?

Agatha. I couldn't stand it—when she began to sprout.

Children. Sprout? Myra? what's she sprouting?

Jimmy. It looks like feathers.

Children. Feathers?

Jimmy. And now her tail's growing—there are yards and yards of it on the floor.

Children. Her tail?

Agatha [*faintly*]. Oh, don't! Jimmy—couldn't you run for the doctor?

Jimmy. I suppose I'd better: Dr. Raynor at the corner?

Agatha. No no he's homoeopathic: I'm sure she wants violent treatment. Dr. Bargrave in Milford Street.

Jimmy. Right-o. [*Turning to twins.*] And you girls standing there like gaping geese, why don't you *do* something? Take her up a cup of tea—or a hot water bottle—or *something*.

Myra [*without*]. Jimmy. Jimmy.

Polly. Hush. I believe she's coming.

[*Belinda runs to door L. and flings it open.*]

Belinda. [*staring in ecstasy*]. O Myra! How lovely!

Jimmy. O Myra! How awful!

All. O my good gracious goodness, Myra!!

[*Myra totters in, supporting herself from chair to chair, until she reaches the table, against which she leans trembling. A beam of fairy radiance falls upon her, emphasizing the glories of her toilette. She is in full evening dress of white satin with a heavy court train falling from the shoulders, and embroidered with pearl and diamond flowers. Diamonds blaze at her throat and on her corsage, ropes of pearls hang from her neck,*

and her arms and fingers are loaded with bracelets and rings. On her head is a diamond tiara, from which waves a forest of white ostrich plumes.]

Myra. Jimmy—now could you leave me, Jimmy?

Jimmy. I'm going for the doctor.

Myra [*clutching him*]. No, no. Let's all keep together. I don't know what may be going to happen next.

Agatha. I don't know what has happened *now*. I can't understand.

Myra. Well—you *saw*. I was just trying on that frock of yours when all of a sudden it—it went.

Twins—Went?

Mysra. It wasn't there. And then *her* frock went—and then I began to break out like this. Don't come near me, children; it's probably catching.

Agatha. O Myra, the jewels! I shouldn't mind catching some of them. *Look* at the diamonds—and aren't those pearls—pearls as big as marbles?

Jimmy. And they're stuck all over her. My word, if we could spout her as she stands she'd fetch pounds and pounds.

Agatha. Pounds? That dress is worth hundreds—thousands!

Myra. But it won't come off—I've tried. Not a thing will come off.

Jimmy [*aghast*]. Won't come off? But it *must*. You can't go about like that. I'll tell you plainly you don't come tagging after me down town in white stain and feathers.

Belinda [*solemnly*]. It will all vanish at twelve o'clock, just like Clinderella's ball dress.

Jimmy. Oh, shut your head, Belinda.

Myra. Look here, Belinda, we've got enough to worry us without *your* twaddle. Don't talk of what you know nothing about.

Polly. But she *does* know.

Dolly. She's trying to tell you. It's true.

Myra. One at a time, children. *What's true?*

Jimmy. Come on, cough it up, Belinda.

Belinda. True that a Fairy came and——

Myra. A *what?*

Polly. A Fairy.

Dolly. Yes, really a Fairy. We saw her too.

Belinda. It's Hallowe'en, you know. She gave us all wishes, and I wanted you to have a nice new frock for the Economy Lecture.

Myra. And—is this it?

Jimmy [going into guffaws of laughter]. Oh, my eye, the Economy Lecture! Quiet and appropriate —eh, Myra?

Belinda. We said it was to be quiet and appropriate, didn't we?

Twins. Yes, yes, we did.

Myra [with the calm of despair]. I should like to see the Fairy's notion of something a little dressy. But what about poor Agatha? Is your Fairy responsible for *her* present—er—costume?

Agatha [ruefully]. It seems to be all or nothing with her.

Belinda. That was Polly.

Polly. Sneak. I may have hinted that Agatha had too many frocks, but I never asked the old lady to take away every stitch the girl stands up in.

Dolly. How were we to know that fairies are so beastly literal?

Jimmy [taking off his coat]. I call it a shame. Here Agatha, put this on. It won't look quite so—so evening dress.
[Helps Agatha into the coat].

Myra. Well, there's only one thing to be done. Polly must go to the lecture, Agatha must go to bed, and I must shut myself into the boot cupboard until

twelve o'clock. Now I hope this is all, Belinda—no more wishes.

Belinda. No.

Dolly. [*feebly*]. N-no—except Jane.

Polly. And the cold chicken.

[*A loud crash is heard as of breaking crockery.*]

Myra. Belinda—that wretched Fairy isn't starting on Jane now—when you know as well as I do how the least thing upsets her?

Children. But we only asked——

Jane [*without*]. If you please, miss.—[*The door is kicked violently open and Jane staggers in bearing upon a silver dish a monstrous gilded pasty from which emerge the head and tail of a well-grown peacock. Jane is attired in flowing robes of pale almond pink, and decked with bracelets and a necklet of gold coins; on her head is a wreath of pink roses entwined with golden leaves.*] If you please, Miss Myra, was it by your orders that this was sent in? [*She slams down the pasty on the table and stands gazing at it as though fascinated*]. When I see the creature staring at me it gives me such a turn I dropped a pile of plates—and never would your Ma approve of any such French fallals and kickshaws from the pastrycook, Miss Myra; plain rost and boiled was good enough for Dogwood Park and——[*Her glance falls upon Agatha.*] Lor, Miss Agatha! [*Realizing Myra*]. Sakes alive, Miss Myra!

Chorus. Jane!

Jane. Ah, Jane indeed. No, Miss Myra, it's not my place to pass remarks, and none shall be passed: I merely ask you whether this is what your Ma would have ordered for high tea for six, let alone the hares and pheasants, shot in like coals they were, and there's a whole stag in the passage and two swans in the sink.

Myra [*hopelessly*]. It's quite useless to explain. A—a friend has sent us a little present of game, Jane.

Jane. Then there's been some mistake in delivery, you mark my words; it's the Lord Mayor's Banquet

we've got, Miss Myra, and our brace o' rabbits has gone to the Mansion House.

Belinda. O Jane, you do look lovely.

Jimmy [*struggling with laughter*]. I say, Jane, have you seen yourself lately?

Jane. Seen myself, Master Jimmy? Ah, some of us ought to see ourselves — you standing there a disgrace in your shirt-sleeves and Miss Agatha dressed — well, I won't say how — and as to Miss Myra, it's not for me to pass remarks, but her Ma wouldn't like it, no more her aunt won't neither. *My* tastes was always quiet, thanks be; plain washin' print for week days and a nice bit o' black for Sunday——.

Myra. Jane, dear—I think you had better take a look at yourself.

Jane. Me, Miss Myra? Is my cap crooked? [*Raising her hands to her wreath.*] Why—what's all this? [*Seeing her gold clasped arms.*] Oh! [*She cautiously approaches the mirror above the mantelpiece and takes one glance at it.*] Oh! [*She sinks into a chair by the table.*] What is it, Miss Myra? What's done it? Oh—oh, it's crool. Dressed for the door I was by your Ma's wish, and now [*extending her bare arms*] I might be going to do the week's washing.

[*Flings her arms along the table, buries her face in them and sobs.*]

Myra. Now she's going into hysterics. I hope you're satisfied, Belinda.

Jimmy. Yes, Belinda, you and your footling Fairy have got us into a rotten mess between you.

Polly. Don't speak of her like that, Jimmy.

Dolly. You might remember that she could turn us all into white rats or guinea pigs.

Myra [*wildly*]. I'd rather be a guinea pig. I shouldn't feel nearly such a f-fool as a guinea pig.

[*Drops into chair opposite Jane and hides her face on the*

table. A fanfare of trumpets. Myra and Jane simultaneously raise their heads.]

Myra and Jane. What's that ?

Jimmy. It sounded just outside.

Agatha [running to the window and peeping out]. Good gracious, look !

[She draws the curtains, the street is seen to be brilliantly lit up. Shouts are heard and a distant hum of voices.]

Jimmy [running to the window]. I say ! Look at those chaps with torches;—linkmen don't they call them?

[The three children run to the window.]

Agatha. And here come outriders in crimson and silver and—O Myra, do look—*[A louder flourish of trumpets. The shouts and uproar increase]*—look at this coming round the corner—*[Jane jumps up and runs to the window]*—six milk-white horses with postilions in cloth of silver and—oh, my goodness—*[Trumpets and an outburst of cheering]*—such a coach, all gold and crystal, and as big as a haystack.

Jane. It's the Free Foresters' Feet.

Jimmy. It's the King and Queen.

Belinda [dancing with excitement]. No, it isn't. It's the suitable equipage. Wait a minute—there. *[A thunderous knock at the front door].* It's the carriage come for Myra.

Myra [faintly]. I knew it. The Fairy has done things thoroughly.

Dolly. And we only asked for the station fly.

A Tremendous Voice (from the street.) THE PRINCESS MYRA'S CARRIAGE STOPS THE WAY.

Jimmy. Stops the way—I should think it *did* : it's the size of a brewer's van.

The Voice. THE PRINCESS MYRA'S CARRIAGE.

Myra. If that creature keeps on bawling out my name I shall go silly.

A man's Voice [in the crowd]. Cheers for the Princess Myra. Hip-hip-hip—— *[A burst of cheering].*

Agatha. Myra—you'll have to come to the window and bow. Royalties always do.

Myra. No, no I can't—I won't.

Jimmy [at window]. Myra, you jolly well *must*. They're packed like sardines in the street. Come on.

Twins. Yes, come on, Myra.

[They drag the reluctant Myra to the window.]

Jimmy. Coat, Agatha, quick, *[Agatha snatches off coat and helps Jimmy into it. Jimmy flings up the sash of window. Loud cheers.]* Ladies and Gentlemen *[dead silence]* Her Royal Highness the Princess Myra, has graciously consented to appear.

[Bows elaborately. Trumpets. Roars of applause, amidst which Myra steps to the window and bows gravely right and left. She then slams down the sash and draws the curtains quickly. The hubbub sinks to a continuous murmur.]

Myra [leaning exhausted against the curtains]. Will any one kindly tell me what we're going to do now?

Jimmy [scratching his head]. I don't know. And aunt may blow in at any minute.

Polly. Perhaps she won't notice anything.

Jimmy. Perhaps not—with a full-fledged circus at the door and Jane looking like the "Last Days of Pompeii."

[Enter Eliza R. hastily. At sight of Myra she hesitates and makes for the door again.]

Eliza. Please, miss——

Myra. What's the matter, Eliza? Don't be frightened.

Eliza. Oh, if you please, miss—missus's compliments, and Miss Agatha's to come home this very minute.

Agatha. I can't, Eliza, you must see that I can't.

Eliza [*with increasing nervousness*]. And please, miss, Number Fifteen desires 'is compliments and—and——

Myra [*coming towards her*]. Yes? And what?

Eliza [*desperately*]. And 'e's gone for the P'LICE.

[*Dashes from the room.*]

Children. The police.

Jane. The police!

Jimmy. That about puts the lid on.

Myra [*calmly*]. Yes. I think we may regard the police as the finishing touch.

Jimmy. Let's see. Five minutes to the station, five minutes back——[*Agatha glances at the clock*]. That clock's no good: it has been at twenty past eleven ever since we came here. We've got about ten minutes. What's to be done?

Myra [*advancing with tragic dignity*]. I have quite decided what is to be done. I am the eldest and therefore responsible; if the police arrive I shall give myself up—"go quiet" I believe is the expression. You, Polly, will take my place as hostess. Jane, it is too late for the soles; you had better serve that dreadful bird [*pointing to peacock*], but for goodness' sake let it be carved off the table. And you, children, at the height of your high tea, think of your unhappy sister sitting in white satin and diamonds in the police station, and [*almost breaking down*] don't make greater fools of yourselves than is absolutely necessary. [*She passes slowly out L. with hanging head*].

Jimmy. She's handling out the sob stuff pretty thick, isn't she?

Agatha. I think it is very affecting: it's like Mary Queen of Scots going to execution.

Jimmy. Of course we can't let her get jugged. Now—what price medal for distinguished service? Jane,

will you lead the forlorn hope—run down and tell those chaps with the coach to go away ?

Agatha. Yes. Say it's the wrong house—they've mistaken the day—anything.

Jane. What ! *me*, Master Jimmy ? Not like this ?

Jimmy. Slip on mother's mackintosh.

Agatha. Put up an umbrella. And if the police come——

Jimmy [*wildly*]. If the police come, just give the whole bally show in charge. That ought to keep them busy for a bit.

Jane [*picking up the great dish*]. If the police come I shall give 'em *this* : that's the way to keep 'em busy. Don't you worry, Master Jimmy : I'll see what I can do.

Twins. And we'll come with you, Jane.

[*Exeunt R. Jane with the pasty, Polly and Dolly.*]

Jimmy [*stopping Belinda*]. Not you, Belinda ; I want a word with you. [*Slaps Agatha on the back.*] Good old Agatha. Still sticking to the ship, eh ?

Agatha. Of course ; but when the policemen come I shall nip behind those curtains ; I'm not—er—dressed to receive.

Jimmy. Then you'd better nip : they'll be here directly. [*Agatha hides behind the window curtains.*] Now, Belinda.

[*Belinda advances timidly, her hands behind her.*]

Belinda. Yes, Jimmy.

Jimmy [*sternly*]. You're at the bottom of all this, you know.

Belinda. Jimmy, I will not be bullied. I've got any amount of people their heart's desire, and if they don't like it, it's not my fault.

Jimmy. But d'you mean to say that this variety entertainment of yours is going to last till midnight ?

Belinda. Yes, till twelve o'clock. The Fairy told me so.

Jimmy. Are you sure?

Agatha [*poking her head out between the curtains*]. Repeat what she said.

Belinda. It was all in poetry; I can't remember.

Jimmy [*catching her by the shoulders and shaking her*]. But you must. Think, you little ass, think.

Belinda [*in gasps*]. I—can only—remember—the last two lines. She said them twice.

Jimmy [*releasing her*]. Well—let's have 'em.

Belinda. "This shall—shall——" Oh yes. "This shall lose what That shall hold——"

Jimmy. This shall lose——

Agatha. That's me. That's all right. Goodness knows I've lost enough.

Jimmy.—what That shall hold. That's Myra, I suppose: she's got away with the goods. Go on, child.

Belinda. "Till the strokes of twelve be told."

Jimmy [*hopelessly*]. Till twelve o'clock. That's plain enough. That does us in.

Agatha [*eagerly*]. Well, but, Jimmy, does it? She didn't exactly say till twelve o'clock; she said, "Until the clock strikes twelve."

Jimmy [*staring at the clock*]. By Jove! I believe you've hit upon the weak spot. [*The trumpets begin to sound again.*] Oh, shut your heads! I'll make the clock strike twelve in half a jiff.

[*Jumps on a chair, opens the clock face and seizes the minute hand.*]

Agatha. No, no, Jimmy, not yet! I'm frightened. It may start something else off—do wait a minute.

Jimmy. What for?

Agatha. Let's think—let's consult—

Jimmy. If we don't look slippy we shall do our consulting in the station. [*A loud ring, followed by a knock at the front door.*] There! The police. Agatha, it's now or never. Risk it?

Agatha [*nodding*]. Risk it.

[*Her head disappears within the curtains. Jimmy whirls the minute hand round to the hour hand and the clock slowly strikes twelve. As the last stroke falls all sounds from the street cease.*]

Jimmy [*breathlessly*]. Well?

Agatha. The street is all dark again, and—*Jimmy*—I can't see the coach: I believe it has gone away.

Jimmy. Let's have a look. [*Draws the curtains, showing Agatha dressed as at first.*] Why—yes. The whole show has done a bunk. The street's quite empty and—[*seeing Agatha*—]hullo?

Agatha. And here's my frock! *Jimmy*—it worked. O *Jimmy*! [*Embraces him violently.*]

Jimmy [*struggling*]. Here, I say—drop it.

[*The twins rush in R.*]

Dolly. *Jimmy, Jimmy!* Jane has come right again.

Polly. And we couldn't find the coach—it's not there.

Jimmy. Good business. My word, what a narrow squeak. Now then for the police—let 'em all come!

Dolly. The police?

Jimmy. They rang just now. Didn't you let them in?

Polly. That wasn't the police: it was this telegram for *Myra*. [*Holds up a telegram.*]

Jimmy [*taking it*]. Give it here.

[*Myra bursts in L. Her fairy robes have disappeared, and she is dressed as before.*]

Myra. Look. Look at me! I'm all right again? What has happened?

Jimmy [solemnly]. The clock has struck twelve.

All the girls [after a pause]. Oh—oh—you clever boy!
[*They all rush at him.*]

Jimmy. Now, drop it, drop it. It was Agatha's idea. Myra! here's a telegram for you.

Myra [tearing it open and reading]. "All settled, home this evening. Dad, Mother." Children—he has got it. Dad has really got the appointment.

Jimmy. Well played, the governor.

Twins. Hip, hurray!

Belinda. Of course he has. The Fairy said most particularly—

Jimmy. Oh, *hop* it, Belinda.

Myra. Belinda—if you so much as mention that Fairy again I'll—I'll slap you.

Agatha. Listen. Isn't that a taxi stopping?

Jimmy. Aunt, you bet. Agatha, you must stay to tea. I say, Myra, don't you rather wish you hadn't been shorn of all your splendour?

Myra. Not a bit. I wouldn't stand in Cinderella's shoes again for anything you liked to offer. Yes, here comes aunt.

Jimmy. Now, girls, pull yourselves together. Tension! Fall in behind there.

[*Buttons his coat and shoots his cuffs. The girls arrange their frocks and pat their hair. Enter Jane in neat black dress, white cap, and apron.*]

Jane. Lady Errington.

All [advancing with outstretched hands]. How d'you do, Aunt Myria?

QUICK CURTAIN

THE PRINCESS AND THE
WOODCUTTER

BY A. A. MILNE

CHARACTERS

THE WOODCUTTER, *Simon Kumar*
THE PRINCESS. *Seema Mahesh*
THE KING. *Vinod*
THE QUEEN. *Seema Prasad*
THE RED PRINCE. *Vinod*
THE BLUE PRINCE. *Prasad Kumar*
THE ~~YELLOW~~ ^{Green} PRINCE. — *Rajul*
Attendants. *Barinder, Satish, Varun*

The music for the play is published by Messrs Samuel French, Ltd.

THE PRINCESS AND THE WOODCUTTER

THE WOODCUTTER'S SONG

Woodcutter—

A humble woodman I.
A plain hard-working peasant,
A simple soul, who on the whole
Finds life extremely pleasant.
I envy none to-day
His lofty rank or station,
Enough for me to have a free
And healthy occupation.

Refrain : Singing and swinging my axe
On the monarch uprearing,
Stroke upon stroke, till the oak
Crashes down in the clearing.
So shall I vanquish, perchance,
Both the haughty and splendid,
Love shall have brought them to naught
When the tale shall be ended.

In realms of faery lore
I need no guide or tutor,
And there, I learn, princesses yearn
To wed the humble suitor.
The truly noble mind
All outward show despises ;

It is not rank, or wealth, or swank
That takes the highest prizes !

Refrain [As before].

The Woodcutter is discovered singing at his work, in a glade of the forest outside his hut. He is tall and strong, and brave and handsome ; all that a woodcutter ought to be. Now it happened that the Princess was passing, and as soon as his song is finished, sure enough, on she comes.

Princess. Good-morning, Woodcutter.

Woodcutter. Good-morning.

[*But he goes on with his work.*]

Princess [after a pause]. Good-morning, Woodcutter.

Woodcutter. Good-morning.

Princess. Don't you ever say anything except good-morning ?

Woodcutter. Sometimes I say good-bye.

Princess. You are a cross woodcutter to-day.

Woodcutter. I have work to do.

Princess. You are still cutting wood ? Don't you ever do anything else ?

Woodcutter. Well, you are still a princess ; don't you ever do anything else ?

Princess [reproachfully]. Now, that's not fair, Woodcutter. You can't say I was a Princess yesterday, when I came and helped you stack your wood. Or the day before, when I tied up your hand where you had cut it. or the day before that, when we had our meal together on the grass. Was I a Princess then ?

Woodcutter. Somehow I think you were. Somehow I think you were saying to yourself, "Isn't it sweet of a Princess to treat a mere woodcutter like this ?"

Princess. I think you are perfectly horrid. I've a good mind never to speak to you again. [*Turns R.*] And—and I would, if only I could be sure that you would notice I wasn't speaking to you.

Woodcutter. After all, I'm just as bad as you. Only yesterday I was thinking to myself how unselfish I was to interrupt my work in order to talk to a mere Princess.

Princess. Yes, but the trouble is that you *don't* interrupt your work.

Woodcutter [interrupting it and going upto her with a smile.] Madam, I am at your service.

Princess. I wish I thought you were.

Woodcutter. Surely you have enough people at your service already. Princes and chancellors and chamberlains and waiting-maids.

Princess. Yes, that's just it. That's why I want your help. Particularly in the matter of Princess.

Woodcutter. Why, has a suitor come for the hand of Her Royal Highness ?

Princess. Three suitors. And I hate them all.

Woodcutter. And which are you going to marry ?

Princess. I don't know. Father hasn't made up his mind yet.

Woodcutter. And this is a matter which father—which His Majesty decides for himself ?

Princess. Why, of course ! You should read the history books, Woodcutter. The suitors to the hand of a Princess are always set some trial of strength or test of quality by the King, and the winner marries his daughter.

Woodcutter. Well. I don't live in a palace, and I think my own thoughts about these things. I'd better get back to my work.

[*He goes on with his chopping.*]

Princess [gently, after a pause]. Woodcutter !

Woodcutter [looking up]. Oh, are you there ? I thought you were married by this time.

Princess [meekly]. I don't want to be married.
[*Hastily*] I mean, not to any of those three.

Woodcutter. You can't help yourself.

Princess. I know. That's why I wanted *you* to help me.

Woodcutter [going up to her]. Can a simple woodcutter help a Princess.

Princess. Well, perhaps a simple one couldn't, but a clever one might.

Woodcutter. What would his reward be ?

Princess. His reward would be that the Princess, not being married to any of her three suitors, would still be able to help him chop his wood in the mornings I am helping you, aren't I ?

Woodcutter [smiling]. Oh, decidedly.

Princess [nodding]. I thought I was.

Woodcutter. It is kind of a great lady like yourself to help so humble a fellow as I.

Princess [meekly]. I'm not *very* great.

[And she isn't. She is the smallest, daintiest little Princess that ever you saw.]

Woodcutter. There's enough of you to make a hundred men unhappy.

Princess. And one man happy ?

Woodcutter. And one man very, very happy.

Princess [innocently]. I wonder who he'll be
Woodcutter, if *you* were a Prince, would you be my suitor ?

Woodcutter [scornfully]. One of three ?

Princess [excitedly]. Oh, would you kill the others ?
With that axe ?

Woodcutter. I would not kill them in order to help His Majesty make up his mind about his son-in-law. But if the Princess had made up her mind—and wanted me—

Princess. Yes ?

Woodcutter. Then I would marry her, however many suitors she had.

Princess. Well, she's only got three at present.

Woodcutter. What is that to me ?

Princess. Oh, I just thought you might want to be doing something to your axe.

Woodcutter. My axe ?

Princess. Yes. You see, she *has* made up her mind.

Woodcutter [amazed]. You mean——But—but I'm only a woodcutter.

Princess. That's where you'll have the advantage of them when it comes to axes.

Woodcutter. Princess ! [He takes her in his arms].
My Princess !

Princess. Woodcutter ! My Woodcutter ! My, oh ~~so very slow and uncomprehending~~, but entirely adorable Woodcutter !

[*They sing together, They just happen to feel like that.*]

OUR FAIRY STORY

Duet : Woodcutter and Princess

Princess. My dear, brown man,
With your strength and grace,
And your most attractive face,
Do you wonder how my love for you began ?
Well, I don't quite know,
But with those dear arms around me
I ~~know~~ my fate has found me.

Woodcutter. My own, fair maid,
With all heaven in your eyes,
Are we mad or truly wise
When the laws of courts and kings are disobeyed ?
Let the world go by,
With its pride and pomp and glory,
We have made our fairy story.

Both. This is just our fairy story,
Every word of which is true,
Older than the hills around us,
Yet so wonderfully new.
All the stories worth telling
Surely must be told by two,
Each must have the self-same ending,
“You love me and I love you.”

Princess. My dear, brown man !
Just because I love you blindly,
You must rule me very kindly.
For I mean to be obedient—if I can !
I’m a poor spoiled child,
And my future education
Will afford you occupation,
But I recognise my master underneath the toiler’ tan.

Woodcutter. My own, fair maid,
I declare your very meekness
Is the measure of my weakness.
And my mastery will seldom be displayed.
For at one shy glance
From beneath those drooping lashes
All my airy kingship crashes.

Both [As before].

Woodcutter [~~the song finished~~]. But what will His Majesty say ?

Princess. All sorts of things..Do you really love me, Woodcutter, or have I proposed to you under a misapprehension ?

Woodcutter. I adore you !

Princess. [nodding]. I thought you did. But I wanted to hear you say it. If I had been a simple

peasant, I suppose you would have said it a long time ago ?

Woodcutter. I expect so.

Princess [nodding]. Yes.....Well, now we must think of a plan for making mother like you.

Woodcutter. Might I just kiss you again before we begin ?

Princess. Well, I don't quite see how I am to stop you.

[*The Woodcutter picks her up in his arms and kisses her.*]

Woodcutter. There !

Princess [in his arms]. Oh Woodcutter, Woodcutter, why didn't you do that the first day I saw you ? Then I needn't have had the bother of proposing to you. [*He puts her down suddenly.*] What is it ?

Woodcutter [listening]. Somebody coming. [*He peers through the trees and then says in surprise.*] The King !

Princess. Oh ! I must fly !

Woodcutter. But you'll come back ?

Princess. Perhaps.

[*She disappears quickly through the trees.*]

[*The Woodcutter goes on with his work, and is discovered at it a minute later by the King and Queen. The music of "Tete a Tete" is played for the entrance. There enter first one red and one black attendant, walking backwards and bowing to the King and Queen. They are followed by two other attendants.*]

King [puffing] Ah ! and a seat all ready for us, How satisfying.

[*They sit down, a distinguished couple—reading from left to right, "King Queen"—on a bench outside the Woodcutter's hut.*]

Queen [crossly—she was like that]. I don't know why you dragged me here.

King. As I told you, my love, to be alone.

[*All attendants go off.*]

Queen. Well, you aren't alone.

[*She indicates the Woodcutter.*]

King. Pooh, he doesn't matter.....Well now, about these three Princes. They are getting on my mind rather. It is time we decided which one of them is to marry our beloved child. The trouble is to choose between them.

Queen. As regards appetite, there is nothing to choose between them. They are three of the heartiest eaters I have met for some time.

King. You are right. The sooner we choose one of them, and send the other two about their business, the better. [*Reflectively*]. There were six peaches on the breakfast-table this morning. Did I get one? No.

Queen. Did I get one? No.

King. Did our darling get one—not that it matters? No.

Queen. It is a pity that the seven-headed bull died last year.

King [*with a sigh*]. Those days are over. We must think of a new test. Somehow I think that, in a son-in-law, moral worth is even more to be desired than mere brute strength. Now my suggestion is this: that you should disguise yourself as a begger woman and approach each of the three Princes in turn, supplicating their charity. In this way we shall discover which of the three has the kindest heart. What do you say, my dear?

Queen. An excellent plan. If you remember, I suggested it myself yesterday.

King [*annoyed*]. Well, of course, it had been in my mind for some time. I don't claim that the idea is original; it has often been done in our family. (*Getting up*). Well then, if you will get ready, my dear, I will go and find our three friends and see that they come this way.

[*They go out together. The music of "Tete a Tete" is played again. As soon as they are out of sight the Princess comes back.*]

Princess. Well, Woodcutter, what did I tell you?

Woodcutter. What did you tell me?

Princess. Didn't you listen to what they said?

Woodcutter. I didn't listen, but I couldn't help hearing.

Princess. Well, I couldn't help listening. And unless you stop it somehow, I shall be married to one of them to-night.

Woodcutter. Which one?

Princess. The one with the kindest heart—whichever that is.

Woodcutter. Supposing they all have kind hearts?

Princess [*confidently*]. They won't. They never have. In our circles when three Princes come together, one of them has a kind heart and the other two haven't. [*Surprised*] Haven't you read any history at all?

Woodcutter. I have no time for reading. But I think it's time history was altered a little. We'll alter it this afternoon.

Princess. What do you mean?

Woodcutter. Leave this to me. I've got an idea.

Princess [*clapping her hands*]. Oh, how clever of you! But what do you want me to do?

Woodcutter [*pointing*]. You know the glade over there where the brook runs through it? Wait for me there.

Princess. I obey my lord's commands.

[*She blows him a kiss and runs off*].

[*The Woodcutter resumes his work. By-and-by the Red Prince comes along. He is a—well, you will see for yourself what he is like.*]

Red Prince. Ah, fellow . . . Fellow! . . . I said fellow! [*Yes, that sort of man.*]

Woodcutter [looking up.] Were you speaking to me, my lord?

Red Prince. There is no other fellow here that I can see.

[*The Woodcutter looks round to make sure, peers behind a tree or two, and comes back to the Prince.*]

Woodcutter. Yes, you must have meant me.

Red Prince. Yes, of course I meant you, fellow. Have you seen the Princess come past this way? I was told she was waiting for me here.

Woodcutter. She is not here, my lord. [*Looking round to see that they are alone*] My lord, are you one of the Princes who is seeking the hand of the Princess?

Red Prince [complacently]. I am, fellow.

Woodcutter. His Majesty the King was here awhile ago. He is to make his decision between you this afternoon. [*Meaningly*] I think I can help you to be the lucky one, my lord.

Red Prince. You suggest that I take an unfair advantage over my fellow-competitors?

Woodcutter. I suggest nothing, my lord. I only say that I can help you.

Red Prince [magnanimously]. Well, I will allow you to help me.

Woodcutter. Thank you. Then I will give you this advice. If a beggar woman asks you for a crust of bread this afternoon, remember—it is the test!

Red Prince [staggered]. The test! But I haven't got a crust of bread.

Woodcutter. Wait here and I will get you one.

[*He goes into the hut.*]

Red Prince [speaking after him as he goes]. My good fellow, I am extremely obliged to you, and if ever I can do anything for you, such as returning a crust to you of similar size, or even lending you another slightly smaller

one, or—— [*The Woodcutter comes back with the crust*] Ah, thank you, my man, thank you. //

Woodcutter. I would suggest, my lord, that you should take a short walk in this direction [*pointing in the opposite direction to that which the Princess has taken*], and stroll back casually in a few minutes' time when the Queen is here.

Red Prince. Thank you, my man, thank you.

[*He puts the crust in his pocket and goes off*]

[*The Woodcutter goes on with his work. The Blue Prince comes in and stands watching him in silence for some moments.*]

Woodcutter [*looking up*]. Hullo!

Blue Prince. Hullo!

Woodcutter. What do you want?

Blue Prince. The Princess.

Woodcutter. She's not here.

Blue Prince. Oh!

[*The Woodcutter goes on with his work and the Prince goes on looking at him.*]

Woodcutter [*struck with an idea*]. Are you one of the Princes who is wooing the Princess?

Blue Prince. Yes.

Woodcutter [*coming towards him*]. I believe I could help your Royal Highness.

Blue Prince. Do.

Woodcutter [*doubtfully*]. It would perhaps be not quite fair to the others.

Blue Prince. Don't mind.

Woodcutter. Well then, listen.

[*He pauses a moment and looks round to see that they are alone.*]

Blue Prince. I'm listening.

Woodcutter. If you come back in five minutes, you will see a beggar woman sitting here. She will ask you

for a crust of bread. You must give it to her, for it is the way His Majesty has chosen of testing your kindness of heart.

Blue Prince [*feeling in his pocket*]. No bread.

Woodcutter. I will give you some.

Blue Prince. Do.

Woodcutter [*taking a piece from his pocket*]. Here you are.

Blue Prince. Thanks.

Woodcutter. Not at all, I'm very glad to have been able to help you.

[*He goes on with his work. The Blue Prince remains looking at him.*]

Blue Prince (*with a great effort*). Thanks.

[*He goes slowly away. A moment later the Yellow Prince makes a graceful and languid entry.*]

Yellow Prince. Ah, come hither, my man, come hither.

Woodcutter [*stopping his work and looking up*]. You want me, sir?

Yellow Prince. Come hither, my man. Tell me, has Her Royal Highness the Princess passed this way lately?

Woodcutter. The Princess?

Yellow Prince [*slaps Woodcutter's shoulder*]. Yes, the Princess, my bumpkin. But perhaps you have been too much concerned in your own earthly affairs to have noticed her. (You—ah—cut wood, I see.)

Woodcutter. Yes, sir, I am a woodcutter.

Yellow Prince. A most absorbing life. Some day we must have a long talk about it. But just now I have other business waiting for me. With your permission, good friend, I will leave you to your fagots.

[*He starts to go.*]

Woodcutter. Beg your pardon, sir, but are you one of those Princes that want to marry our Princess?

Yellow Prince. I had hoped, good friend, to obtain your permission to do so. I beg you not to refuse it.

Woodcutter. You are making fun of me, sir.

Yellow Prince. Discerning creature.

Woodcutter. All the same, I *can* help you.

Yellow Prince. Then pray do so, long-chopper and earn my everlasting gratitude.

Woodcutter. The King has decided that whichever of you three Princes has the kindest heart shall marry his daughter.

Yellow Prince. Then you will be able to bear witness to him that I have already wasted several minutes of my valuable time in condescending to a mere fagot splitter. Tell him this and the prize is mine. [*Kissing the tips of his fingers*] Princess, I embrace you.

Woodcutter. The King will not listen to me. But if you return here in five minutes, you will find an old woman begging for bread. It is the test which their Majesties have arranged for you. If you share your last crust with her——

Yellow Prince. Yes, but do I look as if I carried a last crust about with me?

Woodcutter. But see, I will give you one.

Yellow Prince [*taking it between the tips of his fingers*]. Yes, but——

Woodcutter. Put it in your pocket, and when——

Yellow Prince. But, my dear bark-scraper, have you no feeling for clothes at all? How can I put a thing like this in my pocket? [*Handing it back to him.*] I beg you to wrap it up. Here, take this [*gives him a scarf*]. Neatly, I pray you. [*Taking an orange ribbon out of his pocket*] Perhaps a little of this round it would make it more tolerable. You think so? I leave it to you. I trust your taste entirely.....Leaving a loop for the little finger, I

entreat you.....so. [*He hangs it on his little finger.*]
In about five minutes, you said? We will be there.
[*With a bow*] We thank you.

[*He departs delicately. The Woodcutter smiles to himself, puts down his axe and goes off to the Princess. And just in time. For behold! the King and Queen return. The same music as before. At least we think it is the Queen, but she is so heavily disguised by a cloak which she wears over her Court dress, that for a moment we are not quite sure.*]

King. Now then, my love, if you will sit down on that log there—[*placing here*—]—excellent—I think perhaps you should remove the crown. [*Removes it.*] There! Now the disguise is perfect.

Queen. You're sure they are coming? It's a very uncomfortable seat. [*Takes out long nail.*]

King. I told them that the Princess was waiting for them here. Their natural disappointment at finding I was mistaken will make the test of their good-nature an even more exacting one. My own impression is that the Yellow Prince will be the victor.

Queen. Oh, I hate that man.

King [*soothingly*]. Well, well, perhaps it will be the Blue one.

Queen. If anything, I dislike him more intensely.

King. Or even the Red.

Queen. Ugh! I can't bear him.

King. Fortunately, dear, you are not called upon to marry any of them. It is for our darling that we are making the great decision. Listen! I hear one coming. I will hide in the cottage and take note of what happens.

[*He disappears into the cottage as the Blue Prince comes in.*]

Queen. Oh, sir, can you kindly spare a crust of bread for a poor old woman! Please, pretty gentleman!

// Blue Prince [*standing stolidly in front of her and feeling in his pocket*]. Bread.....Bread.....Ah!

Bread !

[He offers it.]

Queen. Oh, thank you, sir. May you be rewarded for your gentle heart.

Blue Prince. Thank you.

[He stands gazing at her. There is an awkward pause.]

Queen. A blessing on you, sir.

Blue Prince. Thank you. *[He indicates the crust.]*
Bread.

Queen. Ah, you have saved the life of a poor old woman.

Blue Prince. Eat it.

Queen *[embarrassed]*. I—er—you—er——

[She takes a bite and mumbles something.]

Blue Prince. What?

Queen *[swallowing with great difficulty]*. I'm almost too happy to eat, sir. Leave a poor old woman alone with her happiness, and——

Blue Prince. Not too happy. Too weak. Help you eat. *[He breaks off a piece and holds it to her mouth. With a great effort the Queen disposes of it.]* Good !..... Again ! *[She does it again.]* Now ! *[She swallows another piece.]* Last piece ! *[She takes it in. He pats her kindly on the back, and she nearly chokes.]* Good.....Better now?

Queen *[weakly]*. Much.

Blue Prince. Good-day.

Queen *[with an effort]*. Good-day, kind gentleman.

[He goes out.]

[The King is just coming from the cottage, when he returns suddenly. The King slips back again.]

Blue Prince. Small piece left over. *[He gives it to her. She looks hopelessly at him.]* Good-bye. //

[He goes.]

Queen *[throwing the piece down violently]*. Ugh ! What a man !

King [coming out]. Well, well, my dear, we have discovered the winner.

Queen [from the heart]. Detestable person!

King. The rest of the competition is of course more in the nature of a formality——

Queen. Thank goodness.

King. However, I think that it will prevent unnecessary discussion afterwards if we—— Take care, here is another one. [He hurries back.]

[Enter the Red Prince].

Queen [with not nearly so much conviction]. Could you spare a crust of bread, sir, for a poor hungry old woman?

Red Prince. A crust of bread, madam? Certainly. As luck will have it, I have a crust on me. My last one, but—your need is greater than mine. Eat, I pray. ✓

Queen. Th-thank you, sir.

Red Prince. Not at all. Come, eat. Let me have the pleasure of seeing you eating.

Queen. M-might I take it home with me, pretty gentleman?

Red Prince [firmly]. No, no. I must see you eating. Come! I will take no denial.

Queen. Th-thank you, sir. [Hopefully] Won't you share it with me?

Red Prince. No, I insist on your having it all. I am in the mood to be generous. Oblige me by eating it now, for I am in a hurry; yet I will not go until you have eaten. [She does her best.] You eat but slowly. [Sternly.] Did you deceive me when you said you were hungry?

Queen. N-no. I'm very hungry. [She eats]

Red Prince. That's better. Now understand—however poor I am, I can always find a crust of bread for an old woman. Always! Remember this when next you are hungry..... You spoke? [She shakes her head and goes on eating.] Finished?

Queen [with great difficulty]. Yes, thank you, pretty gentleman.

Red Prince. There's a piece on the ground there that you dropped. [She eats it in dumb agony.] Finished?

Queen [huskily]. Yes, thank you, pretty gentleman.

Red Prince. Then I will leave you, madam. Good-morning. [He goes out.]

[The Queen rises in fury. The King is about to come out of the cottage, when the Yellow Prince enters. The Queen sits down again and mumbles something. It is certainly not an appeal for bread, but the Yellow Prince is not to be denied.]

Yellow Prince [gallantly]. My poor woman, you are in distress. It pains me to see it, madam, it pains me terribly. Can it be that you are hungry? I thought so, I thought so. Give me the great pleasure, madam, of relieving your hunger. See [holding up his finger] my own poor meal. Take it! It is yours.

Queen [with difficulty]. I am not hungry.

Yellow Prince. Ah, madam, I see what it is. You do not wish to deprive me. You tell yourself, perchance, that it is not fitting that one in your station of life should partake of the meals of the highly born. You are not used, you say, to the food of Princes. Your rougher palate——

Queen [hopefully]. Did you say the food of princes?

Yellow Prince. Where was I, madam. You interrupted me. No matter—eat. [She takes the scarf and unties the ribbon.] Ah, now I remember. I was saying that your rougher palate——

Queen [discovering the worst]. No! no! not bread!

Yellow Prince. Bread, madam, the staff of life. Come, madam, will you not eat? [She tries desperately.] What can be more delightful than a crust of bread by the wayside?

[The Queen shrieks and falls back in a swoon. The King rushes out to her.]

King [to *Yellow Prince*.] Quick, quick, find the Princess.

Yellow Prince. The Princess—find the Princess !

[*He goes vaguely off and we shall not see him again. But the Woodcutter and the Princess do not need to be found. They are here.*]

Woodcutter [to *Princess*.] Go to her, but don't show that you know me.

[*He goes into the cottage, and the Princess hastens to her father.*]

Princess. Father !

King. Ah, my dear, you're just in time. Your mother——

Princess. My mother?

King. Yes, yes. A little plan of mine—of hers—your poor mother. Dear, dear !

Princess. But what's the matter?

King. She is suffering from a surfeit of bread, and——

[*The Woodcutter comes up with a flagon of wine.*]

Woodcutter. Poor old woman ! She has fainted from exhaustion. Let me give her some——

Queen [shrieking.] No, no, not bread ! I will not have any more bread.

Woodcutter. Drink this, my poor woman.

Queen [opening her eyes.] Did you say drink?

[*She seizes the flagon and drinks.*]

Princess. Oh, sir, you have saved my mother's life !

Woodcutter. Not at all.

King. I thank you, my man, I thank you.

Queen [goes to *Woodcutter* and flings her arms round him.] My deliverer ! Tell me who you are !

Princess. It is my mother, the Queen, who asks you.

Woodcutter [amazed, as well he may be]. The Queen !

[*Kneels and covers his face.*]

King. Yes, yes, Certainly, the Queen.

Woodcutter [taking off his hat]. Pardon, Your Majesty. I am a woodcutter, who lives alone here, far away from courts.

Queen. Well, you've got more sense in our head than any of the Princess that *I've* seen lately. You'd better come to court.

Princess [shyly.] You will be very welcome, sir.

Queen. And you'd better marry the Princess.

King. Isn't that perhaps going a *little* too far, dear?

Queen. Well, you wanted kindness of heart in your son-in-law, and you've got it. And he's got common sense too. [To Woodcutter] Tell me, what do you think of bread as—as a form of nourishment?

Woodcutter [cautiously.] One can have too much of it.

Queen. Exactly my view. [To king] There you are, you see.

King. Well, if you insist. The great thing, of course, is that our darling child should be happy.

Princess. I will do my best, father.

[*She takes the Woodcutter's hand*]

King. Then the marriage will take place this evening. [With a wave of his wand] Let the revels begin.

[*They begin. Children dance, the refrain of the "Fairy Story" being used. The King and Queen go off, and the Curtain falls.*]

